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May is asthma awareness month, and Tuesday, May 1 is World Asthma Day. Spring is the time for allergies, and is a good time to educate the public about the importance of controlling asthma.

Asthma affects many Hoosiers and is one of the most common chronic conditions in Indiana. It is estimated that 389,500 Hoosier adults and 150,400 children suffer from asthma. It is a serious and costly disease, causing a financial burden of \$278,230,000 each year in our state.

Asthma is a chronic inflammatory disease that affects the lungs. The inflammation causes the airways in the lungs to constantly tighten and swell as well as produce increased amounts of mucous. As a result, air does not move freely in and out of the lungs, making it difficult to breathe. These changes in the airway cause asthma attacks.

Though the disease affects all age groups, it is more commonly found in children than adults. The disease is a leading cause of school absenteeism and of hospitalizations among children. Asthma is more common in young boys than in girls. But after puberty asthma becomes more common in girls. The good news is, asthma can be controlled.

Each person with asthma has different signs and symptoms. Common symptoms include chest tightness, shortness of breath, coughing, and wheezing. Asthma does not have to restrict activities, disrupt family and caregiver routine, and/or cause loss of sleep. If you or your child has asthma, you can minimize the impact of this disease through C-O-N-T-R-O-L: **C**are for yourself, **O**wn and use an asthma action plan, **N**ote peak flow numbers, **T**ake medicine(s), **R**educe exposure to triggers, **O**pen airways, and **L**ive healthy.

For Asthma Awareness month, the ISDH Asthma Program suggests controlling your asthma by taking the above steps, especially take your medicines and reduce exposure to triggers. You should make sure that you take the right medicine, in the right amount, and at the right time. Also, you should avoid your triggers - things that cause asthma attacks. Common triggers include mold, dust, tobacco smoke, animal dander, cockroaches, outdoor air pollution, and exercise. If exercise is one of your triggers, talk with your health care provider on ways to stay active. Asthma is not an excuse to stop being active.

If you or your child has asthma, you should talk with a health care provider often, work as a team to address the condition, and develop an asthma action plan. This plan should include a daily plan to follow, a list of controller medications and rescue medicines, and actions to take when you or your child is having an attack. A child's asthma action plan should be shared with other caregivers and school personnel.

As we join other organizations around the world in raising awareness of asthma during May, we encourage you to take control of asthma!